



CHAPTER XI.

To attempt to repeat fully the tale of woe of the worthy Senor Trimbado about the loss to him of his leading lady would involve a narration too long perhaps to justify its introduction in this story. Felix and I, of course, had certain definite grounds of opinion as to whom Lupita had gone away with, but there was no reason for imparting our belief to the maestro. But for his consolation we suggested that she would perhaps return, like the proverbial penny, or at worst could be well replaced by some stage attraction not so difficult to manage and so uncertain to keep. Deep as was his trouble time was pressing, and there were important things to do, so there were had soon to turn to the final preparations for setting his establishment in motion to travel toward Silver City. But first he tendered his ceremonious farewells to us and to Don Ramon and Carmen, who now came out to take their seats in the carriage.

The station-keeper approached to say goodbye, and wish us a safe journey. "I don't suppose I need give you any warning to look out for the Indians," he said. "You know what they are, for you've fallen in with them once already during this trip. It's wise for you all to travel together. With a party so strong as yours, unless they should spring a surprise on you, you ought to be able to stand off a good sized band of Apaches. I hope we'll get news that the renegades have been overtaken by the troops and wiped out before this time."

Senor Trimbado would have liked to join our company for the trip to Silver City, but our horses and mules, with their light equipment, could travel so much faster than his outfit that it would have meant the loss of more time than we could afford to spare to slow our movements to keep pace with his. The senor's carriage was rolling off up the trail, with Felix and me riding behind. Like outriders, as the showman's outfit started away from the station, a mile behind us. We were all the time widening our distance from the maestro's equipage as we travelled onward during the morning, but for the most part it was still in sight across the broad spaces of the plain as it came crawling on after us, like a white sail following in a hopeless chase astern. The people who had started ahead of us from the station that morning had made such progress in their journey that we did not overtake the Missouriian's wagon until noon time was almost arrived.

That the two prospectors were still somewhere ahead of us was plainly indicated by their tracks imprinted on the dusty trail as they had footed it along, following their pack animals. They had set so good a pace that we had not as yet gained upon them sufficiently to bring them into our view. There were other signs interesting to us, and which were important enough to cause Felix and me to watch about us with unusual care. These were the hoofprints of several horses which at some time in the early morning had come into the trail two or three miles beyond the stage station, followed it a mile or two, and then turned off again upon the prairie, heading to the south-east.

That the tracks marked the progress of Sangrado's party or that of the Kid and his companions we felt reasonably sure, and they indicated that it was not unlikely that we might encounter once again the undesirable visitors who had figured in the disturbances of the night before. A torn bit of red silk which Felix, swinging from his saddle, took from the thorny branch of a mesquite tree, past which the strange horse tracks led, was of the tint of the skirt Lupita had worn in the performance of the night before, and it offered a hint as to where that ac-

venturous young woman might be travelling. Under the circumstances it was natural to surmise that her companions were of the Kid's gang.

All the dangers which environ the passage over an Arizona trail in a time such as this could not cast a permanent shade of depression upon the joy of travelling in an air so clear, luminous and exhilarating. There was a great delight in the sense of freedom in being at large and moving, after having been penned up for a day and night at the stage station, and Felix carolled stray snatches of songs blithely, and we joked and laughed as freely as if the spirit of murder and hatred were not casting its ominous shadow upon this peaceful seeming southern plain. The effect of the free air and the motion of his carriage, drawn swiftly by the light-footed mules, was manifest with Don Ramon, and the cloud was lifted that had rested upon his brow since early morning.

As Carmen she had the greatest interest in the scenes revealed by the passing of the carriage, the frank smile and joyous laugh excited by the little episodes and passages of conversation that marked the journey that she might have displayed in her father's carriage on a 'fast day' as she viewed the sights and parades in the narrow streets and spacious plaza of the quaint city of the Santa Cruz valley, the old capital of Arizona.

At noon our little procession halted for luncheon and to give the horses and mules an hour or two in which to rest and feed. The Missouriian's wagon overtook us, and he likewise stopped for a nooning, and his family swarmed out of the wagon, glad to stretch their limbs and get a chance to look about them and breathe the open air. He took a tin pail from the wagon and proposed to set us milk fresh from the cow that morning, a bargain we were glad to make with-

out haggling over terms. So it happened that our luncheon this day had an agreeable element unusual to the camper on the plains in the seventies.

The halt gave us an opportunity to learn two things of interest to Felix and me. As Don Ramon smoked his cigarette in company with me, a little apart from the others, he said something of the discovery that so evidently had disturbed him when he looked on the face of the man found slain at the corral.

"He was a bandit, a robber, and deserved his fate," he said. "He was a follower of Gaspar Sangrado, and in saying that I say all that is vile of a man. I knew his father when the young man was respectable and promising, but this was before he fell under the influence of that scoundrel. But let that pass. It was this which so disturbed me. To see him there meant that Sangrado's outlaw band had crept to the corral, had sneaked there like growling coyotes, with what purpose of violence and robbery, who can tell? If it had been the leader that was killed instead of his follower, it would have been the riddance to the world of the worst villain unhang-ded. But so long as he lives to plot night and day, who knows what mischief may still be on foot?"

The old Don's voice, intense in its feeling and intonation, expressed all that a voice could express of repressed vindictiveness. Upon his face was a look of hatred, deep and intense, in utter contrast with its customary kindness of expression. He did not suspect that I could trace his fierce look and resentment to its true cause—the pretensions of Sangrado to the hand of his beloved daughter and the menace it meant to her safety. This I could perceive—that the father, without exciting her fears by imparting to her his anxieties in the matter, was keeping watch and ward over her with solicitous care, which had been transformed into fierce anger by the evidence presented when he saw that the dead man had been a follower of the hated Sangrado.

Perhaps in introducing the subject he meant more to relieve his mind by denouncing his enemy to me. It might be that he desired to find out how much I had seen or suspected of the true object that had brought the bandit and his following to the stage station, and if I had divined Sangrado's purpose in entering the corral. If such were the case, he was disappointed, for, adhering to my purpose of keeping clear of the matter, except when emergency rose to threaten the Don or his daughter, I gave no sign that I believed the bandit's visit

suppose that robbery. While I talked with her father Carmen was in conversation with Felix. They had strolled over to the Missouriian's wagon, where she stood by the wheel with the children clustered about her, gazing with wonder and admiration upon her dark beauty, and apparently entranced by her manner that made her appear to them to be a divinely superior being. Here, while caressing the youngest child and smiling graciously upon them all, she was talking in Spanish with Felix, a language that these two, of all that composed the group, alone could understand.

Upon Carmen's face came certain transformations of expression characteristic of the young girl of her race when confronted by strangers. She looked unwontedly serious, then a little puzzled and perplexed, gazed full at Felix for an instant, and then looked down. She had the unusual chance to speak confidentially with this young man who two days before had been an utter stranger to her, and now she was at a loss how to open the conversation.

"Mr. Felicee," she said at last, with a side glance over toward where her father sat, as if to assure herself that he was not listening, "you will pardon me, please, for asking you a question. Last night, you know, I came to the door of my room that opened into the corral while the men were firing. But before I went upon the step I had heard in my room some things that were said and knew some things that were done outside the house. The voice came to me of Lupita, and she was talking with a man outside the corral. Do you know the name of the man with whom she talked?"

Felix answered her:—"It was a man that I never saw or heard of before that night. She called him Gaspar Sangrado."

Again Carmen spoke:—"Did you hear and do you recall what Lupita said to him—that I care for him no more than I do for the dust under my father's carriage wheels; that I despise him; that I look upon his pretensions with amazement—with amazement at his presumptuousness? What she said is true. He is not of any kind or station. But he is dangerous—dangerous like the rattlesnake, the tarantula—to my father, to myself, to you."

She lowered her eyes a second, then lifted them to meet his, and there came a warmth to her cheek and brow like the sunset glows behind the darkened tints of a clouded April twilight.

"His revenge will not sleep," she continued. "You have roused his resentment. You have left free to harm you a foe that once you had at your mercy. Don Felicee, you are a man and a cavalero, and I but a girl with all to learn, but here let me tell you that you acted unwisely. You foiled the revenge of a desperate man, and yet left him alive to sting you, and you took that risk for such a creature as Lupita. It was for her sake that you interfered with him, and then you made the mistake that you struck down his arm merely when you should have let him alone or have killed him. Why did you not fire when your rifle held his life at its muzzle, and waited only your touch upon the trigger to dismiss it? Then you would have rid the world of a villain and have left yourself and others perhaps dear to you in safety."

"Senorita Dona Carmen Velasquez Bustamante," said Felix, gravely, giving the girl her formal Spanish title, "I had Sangrado's life in my hand, as you say, and I meant to kill him as truly as I now speak to you. It was not that I wished to spare him, but because you stood upon the step beyond him, and the shot that killed him would have taken your life at the same moment. For that reason, and for that only, I held my hand. To save Lupita's life, my own life, a hundred lives, to destroy a villain such as we knew Sangrado to be, I could not have fired that shot. Are you satisfied, Dona Carmen, that in acting as I did I acted right?"

"Right? Yes, that may be! And one should have acted wrong at such a time. You should have thought no more of me than if I had been a thousand miles away, than if I had been a stick or stone, and killed him, then let the bullet find its way where it would. I believe it could not have struck me, aimed it where you might. There was more appointed for my days of life than for that to happen—so soon at least. And if it had, what would you have cared, senor?"

She looked at him full in the face, and again a glow mantled her cheek. Was Carmen, child and schoolgirl and Spanish, in coquetry or in earnest, practising her charms upon my comrade, who might find the happiness or the bane of his life in the impressive and even sudden and unprepared-for moment? What Felix might have said or done in answer to this question had time been allowed him for the purpose is not a part of this story. He had had the good fortune of an interview, remarkably protracted and confidential, with the beautiful senorita. And it was on the plain of San Simon where, with a travelling party, such an episode would seem unlikely. The close of this one was at hand.

"Carmen, Carmen!" called Don Ramon, whose cigarette and five minute siesta both were finished. Now he had recalled the circumstance that hours and minutes are precious when a little travelling party has before it the long night and day push from the San Simon stage station to Silver City, and the Apaches are on the war-path. Manuel was leading the mule-paths, the carriage, and Felix and Carmen passed from the group of little tow-heads who stood listening with unfailing admiration and wonder to the two handsome young strangers talking interestedly together in an unknown tongue.

(To be Continued.)

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" Emerald	8.58 "
" Freetown	9.08 "
" Kensington	9.22 "
" Summerside	9.45 "
" Misconche	9.50 "
" Wellington	10.00 "
" Port Hill	10.25 "
" O'Leary	10.55 "
" Bloomfield	11.10 "
" Alberton	11.30 "
" Tignish	6.00 "

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Charlottetown to Milton, inclusive	\$1.25
Colville to Fredericton, "	1.15
Elliot's to Bluesbank, "	.95
Kensington to Misconche, "	.85
St. Nicholas to Northam, "	.75
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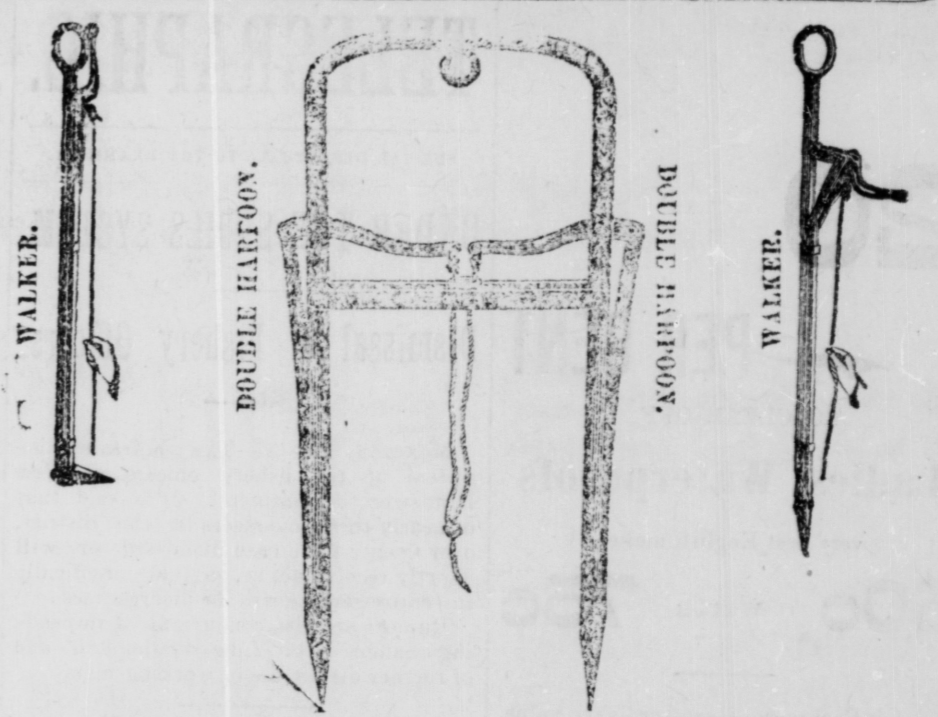
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